PROC. ENTOMOL. SOC. WASH.
83(2), 1981, p. 359

Note

Synonymy by Way of Teratology
(Chilopoda: Lithobiomorpha: Lithobiidae)

Not a few chilopod taxa, genera, species, have been founded upon ontogenetic aberrations. This accounts for such freaks or sports being found only once. Confronted with a suspect anomaly, one should take into consideration both the nature of the single bizarre feature and also the rest of the animal.

In 1945 R. V. Chamberlin proposed *Physobius* n.g. for a single species, *rappi* n. sp., from Mahomet, Illinois (Entomol. News 56(8): 197). It is clear from the description that genus and species are really founded upon a single bizarre character: There is only a single prosternal tooth on each side of the diastema. In all other Lithobiomorpha there are two or more teeth per side. Elsewhere in the description, especially in the generic diagnosis, confusing and contradictory statements are made pertinent to various signal features. For instance he compared his species to the sexually dimorphic males of *Garibius*, even though his single specimen was a female. I can only explain such discrepancies by imagining that he must have been examining several different sorts of specimens, in this case species, and not only his single female holotype. In any case the new name must be based upon that female holotype.

I have examined the holotype, which is in the Chamberlin Collection at the U.S. National Museum of Natural History. It has indeed one prosternal tooth on each side; however, such is the nature of the prosternum including the teeth that one cannot avoid suspecting them to be developmental aberrations. Furthermore, if one discounts the original description and the bizarre prosternum, if one takes into account only the rest of the animal, one sees that it can only be *Pokabius bilabiatus* (Wood, 1867). Accordingly, *Physobius* Chamberlin, 1945, is a junior synonym of *Pokabius* Chamberlin, 1912, and *rappi* Chamberlin, 1945, is a junior synonym of *bilabiatus* (Wood, 1867) (New Synonymies).

The Wood species is absolutely distinctive; it would be very difficult to confuse either sex with the sexes of any other species; furthermore, it is the most prevalent and ubiquitous lithobiid of the North American steppes. This is a case of what I shall call taxonomic tunnel-vision. It is thus possible to be so immersed in the rapt contemplation of just one extraordinary character that one fails to take the rest of the animal into consideration, in doing so describing nothing but another synonym.

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